

Message Text

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PAGE 01 NOUAKC 02709 060909Z

42

ACTION AF-08

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FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6558

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY DAKAR

AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY RABAT

USMISSION USUN NY

C O N F I D E N T I A L NOUAKCHOTT 2709

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: PFOR, MARR, MPOL, MR, MO, SS

SUBJECT: SAHARA WATCH: RECENT MAURITANIAN DEVELOPMENTS

SUMMARY: MILITARY SITUATION IN NORTHERN MAURITANIA IS QUIET FOR MOMENT, ALTHOUGH POLISARIO RETAINS CAPACITY FOR CONSIDERABLE TROUBLEMAKING, PARTICULARLY OF HIT-AND-RUN VARIETY. MOROCCAN-MAURITANIAN MILITARY COOPERATION IS GROWING; LIAISON GROUPS HAVE BEEN EXCHANGED AND MOROCCO HAS AGREED TO IMPROVE MAURITANIAN AIRSTRIPS. MOROCCAN CHARGE IN NOUAKCHOTT BELIEVES MOROCCAN-MAURITANIAN DIPLOMACY ON SAHAR QUESTION IS PROCEEDING WELL; HE EXPECTS NO DIFFICULTY AT UNGA THIS YEAR. BOTH MOROCCAN CHARGE AND MAURITANIAN MILITARY PERSONNEL ASSERTED TO US CATEGORICALLY THAT CUBAN ADVISERS ARE TRAINING POLISARIO IN ALGERIA. END SUMMARY.

1. THIS CABLE SUMMARIZES COMMENTS ON SAHARA MADE TO EMBOFFS AND DATT BY MOROCCAN AND SPANISH CHARGES AND FRENCH AND SPANISH MILITARY ATTACHES DURING FIRST VISIT TO NOUAKCHOTT
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PAGE 02 NOUAKC 02709 060909Z

NOVEMBER 2-5 BY DAKAR-BASED DATT. ADDITIONAL REPORTS, INCLUDING INFORMATION COLLECTED FROM GIRM MILITARY PERSONNEL, WILL

BE SUBMITTED BY DATT FROM DAKAR.

2. SITUATION IN NORTHERN MAURITANIA: SPANISH MILITARY ATTACHE, WHO VISITED ZOUERATE AND F'DERIK NOVEMBER 2-3, TOLD EMBOFF EVERYTHING WAS QUIET DURING HIS VISIT. HE CONFIRMED ATTACKS REPORTED NOUAKCHOTT 2613 AND 2648. HE ADDED THAT GROUP OF SOME 25 POLISARIO LANDROVERS WERE (AND PERHAPS STILL ARE) OPERATING IN VICINTY. THESE VEHICLES APPARENTLY WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR PREVIOUSLY-REPORTED ATTACKS. HE NOTED THAT POLISARIO DESTROYED TWO GIRM ARMORED CARS (NOT ONE REPORTED NOUAKCHOTT 2648) DURING ATTACK NEAR TOURINE. SPANIARD CONCLUDED THAT RECENT POLISARIO MILITARY ACTIVITY IN VICINITY OF ZOUERATE WAS "SIGNIFICANT" AND THAT POLISARIO RETAINS CAPABILITY TO CASUE ADDITIONAL PROBLEMS, PARTICULARLY OF HIT-AND-RUN VARIETY. EXPATRIATE CIVILIAN WHO FLEW INTO BIR MOGHREIN NOVEMBER 3 COMMENTED TO EMBOFF THAT TOWN WAS QUIET ON THAT DATE. AT SAME TIME, HE LIMITED HIS REMARKS TO TOWN OF BIR MOGHREIN, TAKING CARE NOT TO COMMENT ON SITUATION OUTSIDE TOWN.

3. MOROCCAN-MAURITANIAN COOPERATION: MOROCCAN CHARGE AND FRENCH MILITARY ATTACHE CONFIRMED THAT MOROCCAN LT. COL. MOHAMED BENMIRA (USDAO RABAT 190855." AUG 76) IS ASSIGNED TO MAURITANIAN ARMY HEADQUARTERS IN CHARGE OF MOROCCAN MILITARY LIAISON GROUP. BENMIRA APPARENTLY SERVES CONCURRENTLY AS UNOFFICIAL MILITARY ATTACHE FOR MOROCCAN EMBASSY. MOROCCAN CHARGE NOTED SIZABLE MOROCCAN MILITARY PRESENCE (HE DID NOT CITE NUMBERS) IN MAURITANIA AND GAVE US IMPRESSION THAT MOROCCAN MILITARY WIELDS MORE INFLUENCE LOCALLY THAN MOROCCAN EMBASSY. (MOROCCAN AMBASSADOR MAHJOUBI IS OUT OF COUNTRY MORE THAT HE IS HERE; AT MOMENT HE IS IN NEW YORK.) AT SAME TIME, FRENCH MILITARY ATTACHE COMMENTED THAT COL. BENMIRA IS ALSO FREQUENTLY OUTSIDE MAURITANIA. FOR TIS PART, MAURITANIA HAS ASSIGNED FORMER ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF, COL. AHMED MAHMOUD OULD HOUSSEIN, TO RABAT AS HEAD OF MAURITANIAN MILITARY LIAISON GROUP. HOUSSEIN, WHO NOW CARRIES TITLE OF INSPECTOR OF THE ARMED FORCES, HAS
CONFIDENTIAL
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PAGE 03 NOUAKC 02709 060909Z

BEEN IN RABAT FOR NEARLY TWO MONTHS. MOROCCAN CHARGE ADDED THAT MOROCCO IS PLANNING TO CONSTRUCT AIRPORT AT ATAR CAPABLE OF HANDLING MOROCCAN FIGHTER AIRCRAFT AND TO EXTEND RUNWAY AT NOUAKCHOTT AIRPORT FOR SAME PURPOSE. CONSORTIUM OF MOROCCAN COMPANIES, WHICH HAS DONE SIMILAR WORK IN MOROCCO, WILL BE ENGAGED FOR BOTH PROJECTS. CHARGE ADDED THAT MOROCCAN INSTURCTORS (NUMBER NOT GIVEN) HAVE JOINED FRENCH INSTRUCTORS (BETWEEN TEN AND THIRTEEN) AT NEW ATAR MILITARY ACADEMY (NOUAKCHOTT A-36) WHICH WAS INAUGURATED OCTOBER 19.

4. MOROCCAN DIPLOMACY ON SAHRA: MOROCCAN CHARGE EXPECTS LITTLE DIFFICULTY WITH SAHARA QUESTION AT UN. HE BELIEVES MATTER WILL BE REFERRED BACK TO OAU AND EMPHASIZED THAT ARAB CONTRIES IN PARTICULAR HAVE CHOSEN POLICIES BASED ON PRAGMATIC, NONRADICAL CONSIDERATIONS. IN CASE OF AFRICANS, HOWEVER, HE ALLEGED ALGERIANS ARE BUYING THEIR SUPPORT, ADDING THAT SOME OF MOROCCO'S EARLY SETBACKS CAN BE ATTRIBUTED TO ALGERIAN PAYOFFS. AS SOON AS MOROCCO GOT WIND OF THIS DEVELOPMENT, IT TOO BEGAN PAYING OFF AFRICAN FOREIGN MINISTERS. HE SAID IT WAS COMMONPLACE FOR MOROCCANS TO RECEIVE LETTERS OF SUPPORT FROM VARIOUS FOREIGN MINISTERS WITH LAST PARAGRAPH OF LETTER CITING NUMBER OF BANK ACCOUNT IN BERN OR PARIS. ACCORDING TO CHARGE, ONLY MAJOR BLUNDER IN MOROCCAN DIPLOMACY ON SAHARA WAS ITS UNDERESTIMATION OF STRENGTH AND INFLUENCE OF "LEFTIST" ELEMENTS IN SPANISH MILITARY. HE ATTRIBUTED BUILDUP OF PRO-POLISARIO SUPPORT THAT NOW EXISTS IN CANARY ISLANDS TO THIS LEFTIST INFLUENCE. BOTH MOROCCAN AND SPANISH CHARGES DISCOUNTED IDEA OF AN OFFICIAL SPANISH/MOROCCAN AGREEMENT AIMED AT CURBING POLISARIO INFLUENCE IN CANARIES. SPANISH CHARGE SAID SUCH AN AGREEMENT WOULD TURN INTO POLITICAL POWDER KEG IN SPANISH PRESS.

5. CUBAN ADVISERS: MOROCCAN CHARGE ASSERTED CATEGORICALLY THAT CUBAN MILITARY ADVISERS ARE TRAINING POLISARIO FORCES AT TINDOUF ALTHOUGH HE DID NOT KNOW NUMBER OF ADVISERS. TO BEST OF HIS KNOWLEDGE, HE SAID
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PAGE 04 NOUAKC 02709 060909Z

CUBANS HAVE NOT TAKEN PART IN ANY FIGHTING INSIDE SAHARA. (GIRM MILITARY PERSONNEL TOLD US THAT CUBANS ARE TRAINING POLISARIO FORCES AT INSTALLATION NEAR BECHAR AS WELL AS IN TINDOUF.) HANDYSIDE

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